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Medical Focus - Avian Flu Essentials

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"The strongest bond of human sympathy outside the family relation should be one uniting working people of all nations and tongues and kindreds." – Abraham Lincoln

Dear Colleague:

In the tenth letter in the Avian Flu Essentials series, I would like to address global preparedness.

Many steps have been taken but many more are needed to further strengthen international responses to a possible avian flu outbreak. Avian flu is already prevalent in Asia and Eastern Europe. We must take advantage of the opportunity before us to stop the spread of avian flu.

The following measures concerning global preparedness were recently executed. A foundation was laid when President Bush established the International Partnership on Avian and Pandemic Influenza. In addition, the President has participated in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Economic meeting. By bringing leaders together from countries worldwide, global surveillance and resource-sharing is enhanced. These encounters then enable countries to best target the next strategic actions that need to take place.

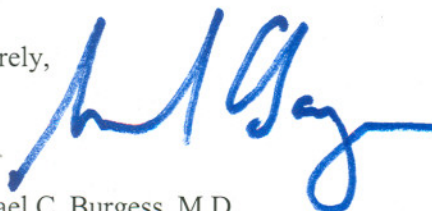
Testing a plan is also an important component in setting up global networks. A two day exercise with the twenty-five nation European Union took place late November to identify areas that still need improvement to deal with a potential pandemic.

Other key players in assessing, coordinating, and combating avian flu are the World Health Organization and the United Nations. In collaboration, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided economic assistance to the World Health Organization and Southeast Asian countries as well as non-economic aid such as personal protective equipment. In addition, USAID is also directing efforts to evaluate the preparedness of other countries, including enhancing early detection in Africa.

Other key areas should be incorporated in global preparedness. Compensation to poultry owners will ensure that these individuals alert their countries early if they detect signs of avian flu. Further encouraging preparedness in the private and business sectors will also help maintain the necessary infrastructure and operations as we deal with this global threat. The US Department of Homeland Security has Ready Business material online to guide companies in this process.

All the principles that I have outlined in the last few letters on the importance of containing outbreaks rapidly not only can be applied to the United States but to international countries as well. Only through global partnerships can we hope to combat this health threat.

Sincerely,



Michael C. Burgess, M.D.
Member of Congress